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Maciej Nowak

A Sentimental Orgy: An Erotic Mischief in *A Sentimental Journey*

So that when I stretched out my hand,
I caught hold of the fille de chambre's
——— *SL* p. 143*

If a work devoted to sentiment and chic lachrymality concludes with a rather uncourteous allusion to a maid's sex organ, the reader's expectations are put on, and the hunger for some cathartic release gets something of a coarsely-cut substitute – a blank space pregnant with erotic suggestiveness. The sexual organ never mentioned makes us think it is just an ambivalence which can be expanded onto a voluble forum of intellectual speculation. The intellect sees many possibilities of interpreting the lack. Yet the commonsensical faculty in us gets the message at once – the *fille de chambre's* _____ can not be an abstract concept – it surely is a _____.

Are disappointment, indignation, smirk, spinsterish discontentedness, or, say, a masculine, coarse and frivolous approval of an erotic exposure – the modes of a “critical” response the author of *A Sentimental Journey* wanted to provoke in the readers of his “sentimental” work?

Is the final “lack” a betrayal of the work's ethos? The journey is an evenly paced trot of an idle observer, a refined conversationalist, a virtuoso of etiquette, the knight of *politesse* vetoing the conceptual inertia of reason, advocating the heartily and sentimental ways of Nature. The lachrymal concern seeks its expression in manners which if hold any peripheral philosophy its must be the one of a sociable contact, a cohabitation of people.

Manners, the form the expression of sentiments is servilely contained in, are involved in anything social and communicable, they seem to be of no use to

* L. Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey* (Penguin, 1987) All references are noted in the text within parentheses.

a solipsistic adventurer, nor do they continue to be any means in the moment of reflexive solitude. The actuality of manners, their social “productivity” rely solely on an interaction; the sensitivity to the issue how important the so-called manners may be to an epistemological reflection we mark in the thought of Shaftsbury and Burke as retold by Eagleton:

Shaftsbury’s unity of ethics and aesthetics, virtue and beauty, is most evident in the concept of manners. Manners for the eighteen century signify that meticulous disciplining of the body which converts morality to style, deconstructing the opposition between proper and pleasurable.¹

Eagleton’s approach endeavours to unveil a bourgeois machination to mitigate the rigid policy that reason enforces upon the world – reason essentially projecting ends reverse to the interest of expansively enterprising social class. The rise of the importance of manners is ascribed to people’s political ambition reshaping the custom pattern so it serves their ideological assumptions. In other words, a man-of-manners attempts at forging of an epistemo-ethical justification of the bourgeois common sense. Manners in their “manipulative effectiveness” are given priority over laws:

Manners are what vex and sooth, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarise or refine us²

The adventurous journey, a show of well-bred illocutionary becomes an example of posh orderliness; the sentimental parley is somewhat artificial, yet a times strangely auto-cynical:

What a large volume of adventures may be grasped within this little span by him who interests his heart in everything, and who having eyes to see, what time and chance are perpetually holding out to him as he journeyeth on his way, misses nothing he can *fairly* lay his hands on.

SJ, p. 51

The fragment reveals sentimentalist’s interest in a novel contact, his inquisitiveness as far as the local detail is concerned, and the childish zeal to touch everything new he comes across. “Laying hands on” however, is an expression devoid of diplomacy or infantile innocence. A touch, its “signly” ambiguity is central in the sentimentalist’s reconnaissance. A touch, a physical reassurance, though customarily not prohibited, contradicts refined reservedness of an Englishman; one never knows when a touch may be read as a “sexually obliging” gesture. It is imbued with an ambivalence linking the a-sexual decorum with erotic readiness. The subject of our interest is the misty verge where the civilised and well-bred “orgiastically” and “transgressively” give in to the attitudinal qualities they have always negated and repelled from the cultured behaviour and speech. This will be carried out with regard to the study of the erotic, the “erotic” figuring here in its wider sense as

¹ T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London, 1991), p. 42.

² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

discussed by Georges Bataille in his *History of Eroticism*. The present, “erotic” reading views Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* as a work in which the scission between the ethico-ideological content and the “mischievous” latency is in fact conspicuously detectable if the text is suspended by an “erotic”, critical closure. The study will focus on the literary images which illuminated by our interpretation will take on the status of erotically-valid objects at times referred to as “erotic requisites”. The existential implications of such a requisite and its function will be brought out as contrasted with an object whose worldly operativity is solely justified in its pragmatic significance. Hence *pragmata* will be sought to interfere negatively with the erotic spontaneity.

The Bataillean term “eroticism” and whatever it signifies, stand in the opposition to consumption, utility, commonsensical experience of the everyday routine, circumspection, and finally – labour.³ Eroticism akin but not identical with sexuality, stands for man’s inherent drive for an unbothered satisfaction of one’s restrained desire, a kind of existential autonomy the experience of which resolves the usual, mundane experience. The structure of the everyday way-about of man has been raised by the civilisational communion of all people attaining an intellectual and technological refinement, the world of which runs on storing and consuming of commodities. The subject absorbed in the monotony of the mundane with its unabating tide of commercial enterprise surging the masses in accordance to the principle of earning and spending, is destined to a discrete desire to resolve itself in a primeval unicity. Such an experience, a sensing of immediate wholeness is aimed against the concrete reality. Eroticism as want for transgression distrusts an utilisable object for its commercial qualities fettering man to the orderedness of culture and civilisation; the erotic and its object must be associated with a transgression, breach and *uselessness*.⁴ Eroticism, a relieving fit of wholeness, is also a hushed fascination for the repugnant secretions of the body, the cultured discourse banned from its formal contemplativity. Labour and boredom equip our world with sophisticated facilitations of a thoughtful, yet the blind *techné* which facilitated man’s autonomy from nature and animalness he was apt to repel with all the magniloquence of culture. Erotic itself is not expelled from the mundane habitation of existence, it beyond doubt relieves the corporeal hardships every *now and then*, it is legitimised under the rational regime, yet by principle it opposes and negates the *pragmata* of the objects. The erotic is made to speak in its sublimised form – it is embodied in the aesthetic of the nude, and is thereby not viewed as something directly suggesting the physiological content of sexual organs, but also as sexual radiance transformed onto the objectival world.⁵ Eventually some objects have taken on some sexual significance, the quality desire invests in them is the actual functionlessness. If an object has to play its part in the subtext of the erotic, it serves as

³ G. Bataille, *Historia erotyzmu*, tr. I. Kania (Kraków, 1992), p. 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

a mute means of communication, an agent of a discretely meaningful gesture. Let us animate the point with a sentimental case:

The beautiful Grisset looked sometimes at the gloves, then sideways to the window, then at the gloves – and then at me. I was not disposed to break silence – I followed her example: so I looked at the gloves, and then at her – and so on alternately.

SJ, p. 77

The ceremoniality of a sentimental interaction objects to the drudgeful hassle of a laborious action. It *takes its time*, stifles the impatient on-goings and walks of life of the pragmatic to goad concrete productivity.

Pragmata, Heidegger writes, is that which one has to do with one's concernful dealings, which term's ontological sensitivity has to be yet invigorated in a further phenomenal procedure.⁶ Wielding a tool, *Dasein* operates exclusively on the ontical level where, as it were, its concern resists venturing into the wonder of being in its ontological purity. To paraphrase this in other terms, the consciousness attached to its tool does not discern its purposeful presence itself. So is worldliness, indiscernible in the everyday routine, it is a constant inter-relation of the entities dwelling in it, veiling the absolute mysterium of Being in the occurrences of a common walk of life rather than in the moment of sublimated reflection. The "storage" of certitude for the subject is an investment on the ontical and "comfortable" surface of things, it is the routinised sense of satisfaction that the objects of my environment work obediently within the frame of my projection. If the worldliness is to manifest itself to the ontical tranquility, it does so by means of a mode of concern which involves a rupture of the normal, everyday one, via a strike of deficiency. This comes with equipment's unusability, when it enters the mode of obtrusiveness.⁷ That is to say, it loses its transparency synchronised to the occurrences which constitute the routine preoccupation. The tool is out of order, it resists the mundane concern with a veto of obstinacy, conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and the ready-to-handedness suffers the loss of ground, comes to a turbulent discontinuity.

The context of equipment is lit up not as something never seen before, but as totality constantly sighted before in circumspection. With this totality, however, the world announces itself.⁸

The message of a lack, thereupon, announces the presence of the world not as hazy background of a concernful procedure, but as multireferentiality of the totality seemingly soliciting the ready-to-hand. The unveiling of ready-at-handedness is then in the focus, and in the open stands the contextuality of all action. The erotic "authenticity" is after revealing the worldliness in its wholeness, it beckons the purposeless environmentality of an object which in case of Yorick's sentimental encounter are the gloves. These though central in the scene in terms of physical presence they appear as a mere *pretext* of an erotic game. This game

⁶ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford, 1980), p. 97.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁸ *Ibid.*

converts each gesture into a celebration, a solemn theatre of refined gestures that are there just for the sake of being enticingly refined. The idle expression of the erotic turns an object into a fetishised ornament which is to distract the mundane transparency of things and let them express the irrational right of sexual thrill.

In an innocent frolic, a jovial sociable intercourse, one senses the nearness of erotic involvement, a mystical disclosure of a sexual opportunity. Decorum is the spokes-system of morality and culture, it in some way adheres to the patriarch voice of restriction and prohibition. According to Bataille, it is prohibition in various cultures often repealed against sexuality, that enhances the sexual, or erotic value of its object of desire.⁹ The possibility of avid indulgence, a self-satisfied breaching of a taboo is sought to distinguish man from his natural origin – animals, as it is claimed, are unable to whet and diversify desire and its objects by organising their collective bodies under the power of prohibition systems.

An erotically-valid object, as we remarked is not exclusively the person one shares the sovereignty of unrestrainedness which is achieved in a sexual intercourse – but also the object, place, or smell associated with *her* or *him*. Transgression needs a communicative code, it sets itself under the mask of signs – it understands more than it is able to utter, and if uttered it never takes the literal meaning. The status of the gloves in the scene is that of a transgressive requisite, the sentimental tension quenches completely their *usual*, ontical function. Their range of functionability is extended into the mode of expression of the erotic *pretext*; their eroto-worldly context rips them of their equipmental shine. This makes them by no means resemble Van Gogh's peasant shoes as interpreted by Heidegger.¹⁰ The *pre-textual* unconcealedness of the gloves is not that of equipmentality of the shoes to which Heidegger's lyricism pays its almost panegirycal due to, but that of observant idleness consuming its time lavishly in ceremonial sex games. The mode of transgression therefore is not content with a wholeness of man and his labour, his consciousness is not to be dissolved in the common "reliabilities" of a tool, it instead recoils into the non-being of sovereign un concern, it becomes a boundless prostitution of sense.

An "erotic" reading of a text perceives any behaviour as subject to radical variability, it confirms the dynamic character of human teleology and existential attitudes. It divulges the discrepancies between the actual and *the alleged*, and the ever imminent readiness to refute what has been guarded as most representative of our civilised world – the systems of prohibition. The forgetfulness-in-transgression in Bataille is not a hedonistic isolation, it rather is a generous and gratuitous distribution of one's energetic potential to a worldly wholeness. The sexual activity is grounded in the principle of a gift.¹¹ Physically, a sexual act is a gift of superfluous energy, in a more composite and externalised form the very same

⁹ G. Bataille, *Historia erotyzmu*, p. 130.

¹⁰ M. Heidegger, *Language, Poetry, Thought*, tr. A. Hofstadter (Harper and Row, Publishers, 1987), p. 36–37.

¹¹ G. Bataille, *Historia erotyzmu*, p. 31.

principle governs the mode of distributing women amongst men. The sentimental traveller gives himself to the world, his experience is physical and "concrete"; he offers his sentiments to all woman and is not, for this reason palled with the unerotic monotony of the domestic boredom, nor destined to immaterial fantasies.

... when I have observed how many a foul step the inquisitive Traveller has measured to see sights and look into discoveries; all which, as Sancho Panca said to Don Quixote, they might have seen dry-shod at home.

SJ, p. 36

The sentimental traveller is by no means haunted by a Don-Quixotic obsessive devotion to the chosen ideal or idol. The modus of knavery seems incredibly uneconomical; for sentiments are after giving themselves *away* completely to the stimuli at-hand. A romance-like loyalty in case of a traveller breeds devotion to semblences nourished by the memory of the idolised, blunting attentiveness to the sentimental environmentality he finds himself the new-coming man of. The sentimentalist is open to the specific vibration of the temporary disclosure of events, he treats the figures from the gallery of his ventures to his sympathetic concern being indiscriminate of their social origin. The subjects to emotional care are often rural people themselves capable of positive feelings and sentiments. Yorick meets the man mourning the ass, shows concern for Maria's story, his being-there is purified of visionary fancies; sentiments advocate the priority of heart over head, but common sense and well-manneredness mould the interactive form of an "emotive" adventure. The sentimental traveller knowing his risks, taking the otherness of a different place and custom for granted travels nevertheless urged by the promise of a novel contact in a novel setting.

It will always follow from hence, that the balance of the sentimental commerce is always against the expatriated adventurer: he must buy what he has little occasion for at their own price – his conversation will seldom be taken in exchange for theirs without a large discount. . .

SJ, p. 33

The openness to chance, losing one's attachment to the whispers of whim, a whim of a civilised consumerist, would adumbrate subtly the sentimentalist's need of disinterested prodigality, a relieving escapism and uprooting of one's domestic habits that have become a tedious commonplace. One of the essential trait of humanity consists in setting restraints upon one's needs then to revel in enjoyment with no limits; jeopardy and dread are claimed positive here as they enable a transgression and encourage its sensational intensity. Tresspassing is uplifted by its own possibility and the reassurance when possibility becomes actuality – prohibition is no longer anything absolute.

What is specific to erotic reading with its spotlight of interest penetrating the difference between humanity as culture, and humanity as animalness is the dynamism and flexibility of the behavioural demarcation bond cleaving the two. The term eroticism owes some area of synonymity to "existential authenticity" if the case is a comparison of the two. The erotic does not come in the open as vulgar

entity of the civilised, i.e. as devoid of exaltation everyday-life as much as it does not identify one-sidedly with the concealed provocability or perversiveness of the sexual organs in their purely physiological aspect. It absorbs both. It ought to if it is to provide a successful essencing of human, attitudinal dynamism. Human overall pattern of poses evinces astounding flexibility of its cultured facet, the produce of negating the natural, to overturn to its contrary quality namely that of beastly unrestrainedness. The proximity of the two mutually excluding themselves modes of behaviour are attempted at being summed under the non-intellectual and non-rational "phenomenology" of the erotic. This dialectic embraces both the moment of ceremonial sublimation, man's distancing of himself from animalness and the rampant come-back to primitive indulgence, his participation in orgiastic festivity with no restraints. It might be inferred hereby that the dynamism of erotology hinges on the sensitivity to the "wholeness" subsuming the overtly communicable, mythical aspect of the expressible and experiential as well as the transgressive one which betrays unscrupulously its cultured alternative. Erotology, as we might call it, scans the leakings of sexual unorthodoxy in the customary rationale; at some point man starts to act in a way provokingly adverse to his usual habits of expression. He reveals his secret and shameful nature, affirms it with a somewhat perverse indignation in a manner which normally would not be approved of.¹² Moreover, the very thought of such a transgression would be stifled by a strain of inhibition and intimidation.

Bataille's discourse is original and in many ways precedential in the way sexuality and physiology are treated and publicised. *The History of Eroticism* is the study of man's cultured constitution transcending into the beyond of obscenity, repulsive secretion of his physiology that share their biological basis with body and its organs in their spiritualised and aestheticised perception. The "history's" subject of interest includes the issue of transition from simple sexuality of animals to mental activity of men in which process the role of sexuality is central.¹³ At stake are judgements, thoughts, statements of sexual qualification of objects which in-themselves may have nothing sexual about them, as well as nothing contradicting sexuality as such. The pathos patronising this approach is not, "methodologically" speaking, justified in a strikingly illuminative way. It disrespects an exact approach propping its justification with a sober rhetoric which states that the obscene is considerably constitutive to our nature. Interestingly, obscenity, things decaying in us are not even included in the formal outlay of prohibitions.¹⁴ We fear the animal in us, we see it there and yet we do not respond to it affirmatively. We change the form of our animalish vagaries having had to take recourse in ones in one way or the other; it is argued that the domain of sacrum and its ritual character, are indeed a sacralised form of demonstrating animal unrestrainedness, a celebruous compensation for the rigid principles curbing our choice in

¹² Ibid., p. 105.

¹³ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

secular being. In which case, man's careful edifice of the civilised myth erected by negating the the "putrid truth" of nature, is forever an unsettled and precarious matter. Serious and imperturbable contemplation is one of the many modes of being; fall, transgression are the necessary backlashes of the authentic, they take the biscuit mocking the absolutist ambition of the rational. In *A Sentimental Journey* the transgressive "leaks" are conspicuously inferable. We trail their traces in the sentimental encounters in which detectable is the disharmony between the articulated operating within the regime of civil decorum and the very action, or the actual sentimental intercourse – the magnetism of hearts, a touch or physically sensed unison of people. This differentiates the ether of well-mannered words and the very space of erotico-sentimental vibration, which will be discussed further with regard to Yorick's interest in measuring Grisset's pulse. The other level of the transgressive *play* concerns the work as narrative composition, its experimental finale whose ambiguity, as we have already noticed, is suggestively erotic.

Let us refer to the scene in the Parisian shop again to heed the message of sentimental gestures which are the signs of an erotic *pretext*:

Anyone may do a casual act of good nature, but a continuation of them shows it is the part of temperature; and certainly, added I, and if it is the same which comes from the heart, which descends to the extremes (touching her wrist) I am sure you must have one of the best pulses of any woman in the world – Feel it, said she, holding out her arm. So laying down my hat, I took of her fingers in one hand, and applied the two forefingers of my other to the artery. . . . me sitting in my black coat, and in my lack-a-daysical manner, counting the throbs of it, one by one, with as much true emotion as if I had been watching the critical ebb or flow of her fever. . .

SJ, p. 75

The throb of artery gives the stylishly self-contemplating sentimentalist the insight into the somatic *root* of the sentiment. Excitement, a pleasurable exasperation on discovering the presence of flesh in the innocent fascination with a feminine beauty is subtle demistification of amorous idealisation that negates somaticity, should it imply the involvement of things usually not mentioned in well-mannered conversation. The pulse, another instance of an erotic "requisite", and another *pretext* for maintaining the physical contact, is more daring a transgressive revelation since it resorts to a purely physiological imagery, the sexual object is not only an attractive female, it is also a body with its organic, metabolic turmoil. Obviously, this recognition is far from being framed as discovering the necessary perverse-in-man, it puts the erotico-transgressive terms in the rhetoric of sentimental stylishness which is the paragon of civilised achieve. Hence the sexual is made to speak innocently in a tactfully expressed metaphor of the pulse, the stylishness of the style neutralises the loathsomeness of the somatic content presented in this situation; the style, as it seems, masks the unaesthetic truth, aesthetises it *perforce*. The issue of the aesthetic overlapping the ethical appears relevant again – the style is a means of manipulation, an agent of cultured censorship, difficult to deconstruct since its actual productivity is not that of finite concepts.

Secondly, style as an esthetical category is not an aftermath of ephemeral contingency – it has to be worked out over a longer period of time. A stylist has to take painstaking efforts to learn his craft. A writer, or a painter do not invest their immediate self into their work. Painter puts his style into his creation which:

he has to master . . . as much in his own attempts as in the painting of others. . . . It is in others that expression takes on its relief and really becomes signification.¹⁵

The walk of style is a way of being of which alteration or re-formation is inaccessible for individual decision. Style does not come into being in the craze of individual, internal scission or revelation, it is not a frame the utterer, or creator can bound himself within; it looms in the scope of everyday gestures scattered in the eons of dull routine. Eventually, it crystalises itself in the end when the creator has been muffled with the tranquility of an ordinary task. Ponty writes:

Even when the painter has already painted, and even if he has become in some respects master of himself, what is given to him with his style is not a manner, a certain manner of procedures or tics that he can inventory, but a mode of formulation that is just as recognisable for others and just as little visible to him as his silhouette or his everyday gestures.¹⁶

Style is the part of rational policy to avoid transgressive vicissitudes in the cultured concern, it aims at imposing uniformity upon the whole human existence by cutting out the uncensored from its discourse or convert it to an articulable form, its function has been to *euphemise* the ignoble truth about man's origin being a defecating and ill-smelling creature of nature whose, *uneuphemised* determination might not seem a primeval source worth identifying oneself with. Style distorts the reality but its modus of deformation becomes in the end a conventionalised voice cherishing its right, the right of the style, an institutionalised being.

The style of a sentimentalist is the style of behaviour strictly linked with that of verbal expression which factors ultimately mould the didactic, pro-Christian ideological content of the work. The order of the erotic underlying this content is the order of a mischief dormant in the ambivalence of allusion whose intensity amounts to a customary scandal in the final break-up of the novel's narration.

Stylisation sought akinly to the interpretation we have suggested, is mistrusted by the Nietzschean over-man who notices in it a crafty tool of the weak and servile who postulate the regime of a de-individualised commonplace, a grey middle-way quenching superior enterprise. In one of his aphorisms the manipulative character of stylisation and esthetisation is firmly interrogated:

"Giving style" to one's character – a great and rare art! It is exercised by all those who see all the strengths and weaknesses of their own natures and then comprehend them in an artistic plan until everything appears as art and reason and even weakness delights the

¹⁵ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, tr. R. C. McCleary (Northwestern Univ. Press, Inc., 1964), p. 52.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added: there a piece of original nature has been removed: both by long practice and daily labour. Here the ugly which could not be removed is hidden: there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime. . .¹⁷

To reinterpret and make sublime has been the substance of the illocutionary ether where utterance is to curb the behaviour of man who meets another man, it provides a model of interaction and imposes a limited area of the content the conversation may articulate itself within. Style negates authenticity which is experientiable on the grounds of sovereign ego beyond the rabble body of democratising cultures. Nietzsche destroys the myth of the Christiano-democratic rhetoric, like a false ideology it masks the true meaning – in its crafty stylishness it is opposed to the spontaneity of what we call eroticism.

Eroticism and Thought

Eroticism languishes in the conceptual productivity of thought. Everything that stands on the side of intellect disdains the significance of the sexual particularly in its obscenest aspect. Should it be given a reflexion – it is indeed a reflexion of a patronising, eloquent voice of the sublime rationale.¹⁸ Psychoanalysis is said not to give eroticism its due, the existential expression of desirousness and lascivious cravings, is sterilised under the despotism of academic essencing. The human “demistified” teleology as we already know, in fact thrives on the erotic despite its “statutory” disgust with the unaesthetic side of somaticism unseparable from it. No sooner had humanity enjoyed the leap to civilisation, the triumph of having negated the “scruffiness” of the wild than it sensed the want to re-enter the state of primeval unbotheredness and sovereignty. Hence the moment of disgust has not been vanquished once and for all: the civilised mediatedness and monotony will forever have its adjacent profundis of possible sexual tresspasses, decadent pleasures or sadomasochistic intercourses. The mutidunous exchange between the powerful civilised and the-talked-of, and the powerful perverse and the-never-mentioned in terms other than that of cursing or medical discourse, is strictly connected with the opposition of the determined and the undetermined. It is also represented as the scission between intelligence and passion.¹⁹ What fascinates us and appeals to the passionate directly, is mute to the attention of intelligence. Since the latter cannot justify the presence of passions – it humiliates and negates their source. Bataille claims that intelligence *is* capable of expatiating on the transcendent successfully, yet it takes up the habit of over-abstracting things failing to comprehend them in their concrete wholeness of the real. Its world of abstract things is copied from that of the corporeal ones – the whole project being dominated by the principle of utility. The fact is that the potential fertility of intellect is on the

¹⁷ F. Nietzsche, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tr. W. Kaufmann (Penguin Books), pp. 98–99.

¹⁸ G. Bataille, *Historia erotyzmu*, p. 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

positive side in Bataille, but what is being pushed for in this matter is a radical reform of its representational economy.

Bataille's eroticism-sensitive discourse, as it were, does-not-mind whether it has achieved a sophisticated level of exact eloquence. Its contemplating of "wholeness" is by no means set on systematic grounds. The distrust of determinacy as the always possible failure to the satisfactory expression of oneself is vividly exemplified in Artaud's text here seen through the prism of Derrida's reading. We mention Artaud's non-conformist proclamations because of their apparent pertinence in the question of alertness toward the voice of the erotic in its physiological nakedness. Artaud notices his being absolutely dispossessed of his utterance when articulated, written, represented in the work. The *difference* he notices is the cause of his indignation – indignation toward his lack of autonomy as the author. His despair is manifested in a vulgar poetics of defecation and the repelling aspect of physiology which he uses when he refers to his writerly produce. Derrida's critical stylisation immitates the angry poetics of Artaud's protest:

Like excrement, like turd, which is also well known, a metaphor of penis, the work should stand upright. But the work, as excrement, is but matter without life, without force or form.²⁰

It is the despair of one's never being able to be present in the signly determined, in other words, in comprehensible discourse whose comprehensibility completely relies on the conceptual trimming of the "authentic message". The movement of meaning is the movement of a treacherous and ironical play. What Artaud wants to express is pure body, some sanguine somaticism free from the decay and filth of the prudish word adherent to the occidental culture. Defecation, secretion of hideous slime, repugnant feces, contamination in his diction represent in fact spirituality and idealism. The poet's message is repossessed by the censorship of the spiritual which procedure is called "a cardinal theft" administered by God himself. Not God the creator but:

God-the-Demiurg . . . the trickster, the counterfeiter, the pseudonymous, the usurper, the opposite of the creative, artist, the artisanal being, the being of the artisan, Satan!²¹

Poet's radicalisation, a resentful speculation is to make up for his articulatory unpower – is not writing for a writer something more than a mere game of literature-making? Writing becomes a problem of cardinal significance – it is not a mere textual *difference* one will not put up with, it is the godly furtiveness of every gesture, which is inescapable since one's birth – the bloody separation from the Orifice – the process analogously reiterated in one's defecation.

Defecation, the daily separation with the feces . . . is, as birth, the initial theft which simultaneously depreciates me and soils me. This is why the history of God, a genealogy of stolen value, is recounted as the history of defecation.²²

The somewhat metaphorical generalisation shows us the instance of a "blasphemously" put proximity of *sacrum* and *profanum*. This rather transgressive escha-

²⁰ J. Derrida, "Parole Soufflée", in *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass (London, 1990), p. 183.

²¹ Ibid., p. 182.

²² Ibid.

tology of exhaustion reveals a brisk manifestation of the interdependence between the sublimated, the rationale proper and the repellent, ignoble, decaying. In Artaud the two are made to speak as one, the “one” intervening in life as the negatively decadent of the lofty and double-speaking logos. Spirit and excrement *are all the same* – there is some awariness of the erotic-in-the-world in this expressive attitude – it is by paralleling the despotism of dogmatic eloquence with the curse of the marginalised “code” of defecation that the demaskation of the erotic, in its wider sense, and the disclosure of its dynamism take place. The erotico-transgressive activity in writing consist perhaps in the perverse contention with one’s autonomy to break the prohibition of blasphemy: the idea is to overburden the furtive determinacy with a counterbalance of abuse since the repossession of oneself-in-words is improbable. Whether Artaud blunted his “textual” intelligence by taking steps against the grand Thief, by nevertheless looking for a reliable speech of the body and cruelty is a different matter. The important thing is that a certain sensitivity was proclaimed, namely the unconceptuable sensitivity that the secret(!)ology of detritus is a possibility on the same ground that the issue of transcendence in its eschatological dimension is.

The philosophy of abuse, which in its transgressive ambition is in a way erotic, in its discrete form speaks between the lines of the “sentimental” journal since it orgiastically betrays the law of nature and heart. To recall it again, nature in the sentimental air is *a* Nature aesthetised, the cultured determinacy renders it with a capital letter. It is like the nature of the Stoics, rational and perfect, a model of harmony for the people to follow. Yet this seems to be a metaphorical exaggeration, an abuse of truth – Stoics are hauled over the coals in Nietzsche’s rhetorical frenzy for transforming their poetical dream into an ontological vision, that is to say, for seeking the model of purposefulness for the people in nature itself that is in-itself indifferent and wild.²³ In the sentimental myth, nature is indeed capitalised and *euphemised* in the Stoic manner:

I conceive every fair being as a temple, and would rather enter in, and see the original drawings and loose sketches hung up in it, than the transfiguration of Raphael itself. . . – tis a quiet journey of the heart in pursuit of NATURE, and those affections which rise out of her, which make us love each other – and the world better than we do.

SJ, p. 109

Yorick looks at Nature as the source of cultured refinement, it is a supreme being itself the primeval root of the most perfect esthetics which as we have discussed has a major say in administering the claims of ethics. No doubt this view may seem oversentimentalised and artificial and such attributes could have been ascribed to the entire work if not had been for the curious occurrence of silenced pun concluding the narrative. The cognitive law of innocent and affectionate Nature, the humanist wish to spy the nakedness of the heart, approach the premises of the erotic *par excellence*. And what we mean by the erotic leak is not an interpretable allu-

²³ F. Nietzsche, *Poza dobrem i złem*, tr. S. Wykrzykowski (Warszawa, 1990), p. 13.

sion lurking in the work's florid content, but a transgressive gesture made by the author himself who sacrifices his writing's ethos to the erotic doublespeak and irony.

So that when I stretched out my hand, I caught hold of the *fille de chambre's* _____
SL, p. 143

The story lacks a moral. In a way leaving the reader to work out the conclusion on his own is the author's manoeuvre to retain an autonomy of the meaning *at run* – secondly, it is also a kind of offense and disrespect toward the sentimental idiom of the work. The *fille de chambre's* _____ is also a hesitation to terminate the work with a finite, didactic growth. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche's bombastic arguments target the notion of a "moral". Human cognition excludes the possibility of a truly disinterested insight, the fact is that any research is a conclusion-oriented one where the outcome is actually a message precept-like and instruction-like one corrupted with didacticism. Interestedness underlies any philosophical thesis including one that aims at a perfect essencing of a fundamental scheme of things from any subjective contamination. Those who make up the model of causality and evaluation absolutise a mere rhetorical coherence between the purposefulness of will and the indifference of Nature as was the case of the Stoics. At stake is a figure of speech, an emotive illustration procuring a metaphysical illusion goaded by will to power.²⁴ His deconstruction victimises a false moral which intrudes upon the unrestrained potentiality of the sovereign will. Nietzsche's philosophy batters the problem with a discourse hyperbolised with insult and abuse.

It may be claimed therefore that *A Sentimental Journey* is ultimately an abuse of writerly manners, or better still, of the "ethics" of narration. The sentimental pathos is now betrayed, the unfinished text announces its de-moral-ised autonomy and at risk is the credibility of the sentimentalist's credo. The sentimental *journalist* participates in the meaninglessness of the erotic gap. The erotic, to conclude, does not mean, it is felt, it is a generous gift of *everything* one has written to the world – a wholeness bereft of conclusion. The recognition of transgression is a yes-saying to a prodigal, vital force which having created destroys the fruit of its labour. The nature of this force, the infinite reassurance, is erotic. Perhaps the erotic suggestiveness may provoke a sense of distaste, obviously enough, the conclusion of the narrative does not serve any didactic or pragmatic purpose – the erotic has manifested itself as *the erratic*, it has no concrete object of its own. The manner in which the subject "lays his hands on" is not fair by the rule of *politesse*. All in all, having meandered between more or less overt disclosures of sexuality concealed under the voluble mantle of the sentimental myth, the work yields to an erotic vacuum, the openness of *fille de chambre's* _____ the interpretation or **visualisation** of which is left to the fancy of the reader.

²⁴ F. Nietzsche, *Poza dobrem i złem*, tr. S. Wykrzykowski (Warszawa, 1990), p. 13.

Maciej Nowak

Sentymentalna orgia: erotyczna przewrotność w *Podróży sentymentalnej*

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest analizą *Podróży sentymentalnej* Sterne'a z punktu widzenia ukrytych w niej ciemnych miejsc, w których cywilizowana postawa dobrze wychowanego dżentelmena ustępuje „orgia-stycznym” nieomal obsesjom erotycznym. Rozumiejąc erotyzm, za Bataillem, jako opozycję kulturowo ukształtowanej użyteczności i zdrowego rozsądku, autor odczytuje powieść Sterne'a poprzez wyszukiwanie w niej „rekwizytów erotycznych”, przedmiotów, których status funkcjonalny nie jest dyktowany użytecznością pragmatyczną, a których obecność w tekście świadczy o próbie uwolnienia erotycznej spontaniczności – tłumionej uwarunkowaniami kulturowych wymogów brytyjskiego dystansu wobec innych.

Maciej Nowak

L'orgie sentimentale: la foberie érotique dans *Le Voyage sentimental*

Résumé

L'article est une analyse du *Voyage sentimental* de Sterne du point de vue d'endroits ombragés dans lesquels l'attitude civilisée d'un gentleman bien élevé cède aux obsessions érotiques presque „orgiastiques”. En comprenant l'érotisme, d'après Bataille, comme opposée à l'utilité formée par la culture et le bon sens, l'auteur effectue la lecture du roman de Sterne visant à y déceler des “accessoires érotiques”, objets dont le statut fonctionnel n'a rien à voir avec l'utilité pragmatique, mais dont la présence dans le texte témoigne de la tentative de libérer la spontanéité érotique étouffée par les exigences culturelles de la distance bien britannique envers les autres.